

CLASSIFICATION OF CONSERVATION PRACTICE EFFECTS ON CULTURAL RESOURCES IN MISSISSIPPI

The National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) and 36 CFR 800 require that NRCS take into account the effects of its undertakings on historic properties.

The term **undertaking** is defined in 36CFR800.16(y) as:

“...a project, activity, or program funded in whole or in part under the direct or indirect jurisdiction of a Federal agency, including those carried out by or on behalf of a Federal agency; those carried out with Federal financial assistance; and those requiring a Federal permit, license or approval.”

Historic properties are cultural resources (sites, objects, buildings, structures) that qualify for listing in the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP).

In order to identify which NRCS actions will qualify as undertakings for the purposes of determining their potential effects on cultural resources, Mississippi conservation practices have been classified as Undertakings (U) or Exempt (E) – **Table 1**. The criteria for classification are the potential for the practice to adversely affect significant cultural resources. A conservation or management system involving more than one type of practice covering the same geographic area is an undertaking if any practice within that area is classified as an Undertaking.

Mississippi conservation practices are identified in the NRCS Mississippi Field Office Technical Guide (FOTG) <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/technical/efotg/index.html> . Classifications are based on General Manual 420 part 401.40 through 420 part 401.42 and the practice descriptions found in Section IV National Practice Standards and Mississippi Practice Specifications of the FOTG.

Some practices are listed in Table 1 twice (**highlighted in gray**) because they may be carried out using different methods. For example, *Tree/Shrub Site Preparation* (490) may be accomplished through the use of chemical (Exempt) or mechanical (Undertaking) methods. Follow the procedures for the methods appropriate to the planned practice.

Undertakings (U): Conservation practices that have the potential to affect cultural resources when installed according to standard NRCS criteria are considered undertakings. Normally, any heavy equipment use, ground disturbance, land clearing, or new construction is included in this category. The effects can be immediate (an effect caused by the installation process) or distant (an effect that occurs at a later time as a result of the practice installation), and direct (an effect that impacts the resource) or indirect (an effect that can reasonably be expected to occur as a result of installation). Practices that are classified as undertakings require a cultural resources review and evaluation to determine if historic properties are located within or near the Area of Potential Effect (APE). All undertakings must be documented on the MS-CR-1 form and submitted to the CRS/CRC for review.

Exempt (E): Conservation practices that have no potential or only minor potential to cause adverse effects to cultural resources are considered exempt. These practices are generally management related, do not have any or only minimal physical effects, and/or do not alter cultural resources. Exempt practices may, however, alter land use or ground cover conditions at cultural resources locations. Some of these practices may actually provide beneficial effects such as improving soil cover stability. A background review of the archaeological site files and NRHP listings should be conducted for all Exempt practices. For practices that are classified as Exempt, a statement should be included on the MSEE-CPA-52 form in the Comments field, or the Conservation Assistance Notes (CPA-6) to document that cultural resources were considered and the practice determined to be exempt from further review.